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ABSTRACT

In the context of an ethnographic study of nonverbal communication within the Japanese home environment, issues in the use of videotape recordings for data gathering are discussed. The study investigated language use and behavior of Japanese host families in homestay settings, focusing on the use of nonverbal behavior to facilitate communication. The visual data in this study showed that the host families relied heavily on nonverbal cues during dinner table conversations. While this data was unobtainable by audio recording alone, researchers should be aware of issues in video recording in such field research, in three areas: data collection; data analysis; and reporting. Issues in data collection include: whether the researcher should be present at the time of the recording, or whether this presence creates a distraction confounding results; participants' awareness of the camera; privacy of the participants; quality of recording; and scheduling participant interactions. Concerns in data analysis include these: selection of typical vs. atypical discourse segment, and use of review sessions with participants, to gain further insight. Reporting issues include: acceptability of research results, and participant privacy. The author calls for development of guidelines for use of video recordings in ethnographic research on language use. Contains 30 references. (MSE)

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Issues of Video Recording in Ethnographic Studies

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Abstract

The use of video recording in language studies has become common and has been playing an important role. However, little discussion has occurred regarding various issues relating to its use in research, such as the validity of the data, ethics and privacy. Based on an ethnographic study I conducted to investigate language use and behavior of Japanese host families in homestay settings, this paper looks at cases of non-verbal actions for language facilitation and discusses related issues in this type of research at three discrete steps: data collection, data analysis, and reporting. The visual data in this study showed that the Japanese host families relied heavily on non-verbal means of communication during dinner table conversations. Although such results are unattainable by the audio recording alone, the researchers also need to be aware of the existing issues of video recording in such field-work research. It seems that there should be some sort of detailed guidelines specifically for the use of video recorded data for academic purposes. I call for more discussion about how video technology can and should be used in language studies.

Introduction

The use of video recording in language studies has become common and has been playing an important role in capturing information about non-verbal behavioral as well as verbal linguistic information. Despite the fact that video recording is a powerful tool in language studies, little discussion has occurred regarding various issues relating to its use in research, such as the validity of the data, ethics and privacy (see Erickson & Wilson 1982 for an early discussion of video recording in educational settings). Since such studies involve human subjects, it seems that there needs to be a common understanding or some sort of guidelines in the field. Based on an ethnographic study I conducted to investigate language use and behavior of Japanese host families in homestay settings, this paper looks at cases of non-verbal actions for language facilitation

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which video data captured and discusses related issues of this type of research at three discrete steps: data collection, data analysis, and reporting.

The Study

The study (Iino 1996) took place during intensive eight-week homestay programs over a period of three summers between 1992 and 1994 in Kyoto, Japan. This program offered American students an opportunity to learn Japanese not only in the classroom but also through interactions with Japanese host families. This study focused on dinner table conversations in the homestay setting. Dinner table conversations have been the subject of research by researchers such as Shultz, Florio, & Erickson (1982), Erickson (1990a), Theophano (1982), and Blum-Kulka (1997). These researchers showed how dinner table interactions functioned as a transmitter of culture and offered valuable learning experiences for participants. I chose dinner table interactions, first, because it was evident from my pilot study that American students spent most of their contact time with homestay family members at the dinner table. Secondly, dinner table conversations do not require a controlled setting. By this I mean a large amount of data can be collected in similar settings across families with less physical and psychological burden for the participants than in other kinds of experimental settings. The agenda for these dinner table conversations was not set by the researcher. The dinner table interactions were a daily part of their lives with the host families. The consumption of food and drink also helped participants forget the presence of the third party -- the video camera or tape recorder in the dining room. Thirdly, from a cultural anthropological perspective, a family is a small unit of social organization, and the local events at particular dining tables reflect various meanings that cultures of larger societies hold.

This study falls within the discipline of "ethnography of communication" (Gumperz and Hymes 1964) in a broad sense, and "interactional sociolinguistics" (Gumperz 1986[1972]) in a narrow sense, the focus of which is on the description of actual language use and behavior in natural settings. The main data for this micro ethnographic study comes from video recorded interactions between Japanese hosts and American students, collected by what I call the "remote observation method" (video recording without the researcher's presence on the research site). I asked 30 participating Japanese host families to set a video camera in their dining room on a tripod and to let the camera run for 30-60 minutes at a time, twice during the eight week summer program in 1992, 1993 and 1994. I was not physically present in the situation at the time of recording. Participants were asked to set the video camera on a tripod as far back from the table setting as possible to maximize the visual coverage. Dinner table scenes of Japanese families and American students were videotaped, and in some cases where video equipment was not available and where the participants did not want to be video taped, the conversations were audiotaped. Supplemental data included audiotaped recordings, questionnaires, interviews, and group sessions. The base language at the dinner table was Japanese, and some of the interviews and group sessions were conducted in English.

The Researcher

Geertz said that ethnography is "an interpretive science in search of meaning, not an experimental science in search of law" (Geertz 1973). The principal tool for this research, as in all ethnography, is the ethnographer (Hornberger 1988:4). Since this study investigates contact situations between Japanese hosts and American students, it is essential that the researcher be proficient in both Japanese and English, and be familiar with both Japanese and

American cultures. My being a native speaker of Japanese has a certain advantage in analyzing the data spoken in Japanese. While native intuition alone is not always adequate for accurate description of language use, the native speaker is said to be capable of judging the ungrammaticality and inappropriateness of speech (cf. Wolfson 1989:44). Just like a syntactician tests the grammaticality or ambiguity against a native speaker's judgement, I was seeking to find "marked" language use and behavior in the data, guided by my native intuition.

As for my role in the program, I played a role of double agent; a program coordinator/teacher and a researcher. Although I was a participant observer during the day-time classroom and during invited dinners with host families, I purposefully avoided being present while the video cameras were capturing the dinner table conversations at host families, as I will explain in detail later in this paper. I stayed at the university dormitory while I was collecting the data, and I did not live with the host families in Kyoto. Despite that I am a native Japanese, I was an outsider who came from the U.S. to collect the data and who left the site right after the program. Goldstein (1964:64) coined the term "stranger value" in folklore research: "The collector who comes from afar and will disappear again will be able to collect materials and information which might not be divulged to one who has long-term residence in the same area." Miller (1994) also mentioned the advantage of this stranger value in her video data collection in an office in Tokyo, because the subjects were simply ignoring her (and the video camera's) intrusive presence. In any event, I tried not to be considered an evaluator of dinner table conversations by consciously avoiding mentioning my interpretations while I was on the research site.

Findings: Cases of Non-verbal Facilitating Acts

The visual information in my video data made it possible to capture much of the non-verbal behavior, which indeed matters in face-to-face communication. In this paper, I will focus on some data examples of non-verbal actions for language and cultural facilitation observed during the dinner table conversations (please see Iino 1996 for other examples) to illustrate how video recording in language studies can be used for in-depth analysis of face-to-face interactions.

In order to find out how the host families facilitate the students' comprehension, it is quite important to collect both verbal and visual data in the scene. In language classrooms, teachers often use visual aides such as pictures, objects, and video tapes. In a natural environment at Japanese houses, visual aides and other objects are readily available which help the learners learn and retain in their memory the concept of newly introduced materials and concepts through all the sensory system stimulation.

It was found that the Japanese host families relied heavily on non-verbal means of communication during dinner table conversations. The following case (case 1) shows that the host mother let the student touch '*ofu*,' a puffy dried food cooked in soup, otherwise it is difficult to explain what it is in words. Later, the host mother used her body motion of fish swimming to explain 'carp.' The underlined parts in the data highlight the non-verbal actions in the scene.

Case 1

(HM = host mother, HF = host father)

HM: *korewa ofu, fu wa nani*

(this is 'fu,' what is 'fu' <in English>?)

HF: *nanya ofu da*

(that is, ofu)

HM: *ofuwane kooiu mon, koo sakusakutte* <u>*sawattegoran*</u>

(ofu looks like this, it's crunchy, <u>try to touch this</u>)

Peter: *nande de*

(what... [touching])

HM: *koi ni ageru*

(we give this to koi)

Peter: *koi?*

HM: *koi wakaru*

(do you understand koi?)

Peter: lover

HM: *chigau chigau caapu*

(no, no, it's carp [she moves her body to show carp's swimming])

HF: *naruhodone*

(I see)

The next example (case 2) also shows the effective explanation of '*furikake*,' a flavored fish flake to put on rice by showing one. During the underlined part, the HM showed the package of *furikake* to the student.

Case 2

HM: *furikake, ano gohan no ue ni, tatoeba kovu mono ga furikake tte yun dakedo*

(*furikake*, ah, on the rice, for example, things like this is called "*furikake*" (fish flake))

In this way, the students have abundant opportunity to touch, smell, taste, and look at the material to conceptualize the meaning of the word.

The following case (case 3) shows an incident of literacy teaching when the student asked the host member to write down the word they were trying to teach. The writing media, such as paper and dictionary use, plays an important role in the communication in dinner table conversations. Writing down the word

helps the students recall and memorize, and learn *kanji* (Chinese characters) which enhances literacy development. The underlined parts illustrates such literacy teaching acts.

Case 3

(HB = host brother, HS = host sister)

Amy: *mottainai*

HB: *mottainai*

Amy: [hand a sheet of paper to HB]

HF: *ekonomi, ekonomi* [looking at the dictionary], *setuyaku*

HS: waste of money

HF: [showing the dictionary to Amy] *SETUYA KU*

HB: [return the sheet of paper after writing down the word]

HS: *okane ga mottai nai*

(it's a waste of money)

Amy: *okane ga*

(money)

Besides the language facilitating acts, the cultural facilitation such as table manner was also observed as a teaching subject in the dinner table interactions. The correction of manners would normally occur from parents to a child, and it is difficult to imagine that would happen in an interaction in adult interactions. This data (case 4) suggests an evidence that the host parents took up a responsible role as a care-taker to teach the guest student what they believed was appropriate in Japanese manners. The underlined parts show the HF's facilitating acts when he fist touched the student's knee and then putting it down to the *tatami* mat floor.

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Case 4

Tom: *bozu ga byobu ni jozu ni bozu no e o kaita*

(<Japanese tongue twister>)

HF: *oh*

Tom: *akapaj// akapama akapajama, aopajama, kipajama,*

HF: [correcting his way of sitting by first touching Tom's raised nee]

//ashi wa suwatte iru toki wa shita

(your leg should be down when you sit)

[putting Tom's raised nee down]

Tom: *ah, sumimasen*

(ah, excuse me)

HM: *ha, ha, ha*

It has been pointed out that the sociolinguistic violations are rarely corrected in natural interactions since the act of correction by itself can be another commitment of loosing other's face. Correcting manners is equally risking loosing other's face if the role-relationship -- care-taker and care-receiver -- is not firmly established. The above data (case 4) suggests that the HF's role as an authoritative care-taker and the student's role as a submissive care-receiver were so firmly established that such a corrective act would not be taken as threatening to harm their relationship.

As shown in the above four cases, video recording is a powerful tool in capturing what is happening in the scene regarding non-verbal aspects of face-to-face interactions. Audio recording alone would not be able to show participants' use of objects and their behavior (please see Iino, 1996 for other types of video analyses such as examining participants' facial expressions to interpret the conversational cues in the scene). In the following sections, I will restate merits of using video recording in this type of studies and discuss related issues to be considered in data collection, data analysis and reporting.

Merits of Using Video Recording

The merits of using video recorded data as opposed to audio tape alone or the researcher as participant (either present at table or behind the camera) are perhaps obvious, but they are worth stating. The fundamental strength of a picture, especially a video-recorded motion picture, is its richness of context which enables the researcher to more fully interpret the sociolinguistic implications of the interaction. The use of video recording for microethnographic studies has the potential to influence the discovery of what is otherwise concealed in the unconscious, that is, "to make the familiar strange" (Erickson 1990b[1986]:83). What matters in our actual interactions in negotiating the meaning from second to second is the non-verbal detail of the interactants such as body movement (face, eyes, hands, etc.) and the holistic impression that the person emits (make-up, clothing, etc.) as well as the linguistic features. Detailed information of interactions is, hence, expected to show the interactional cues which tailor the meaning in the particular situation. For example, a recorded utterance on its own can be interpreted in various ways -- serious condemnation, threat, intimacy, joking, and so on, but with the help of the visual context, the number of possible accurate interpretations can be narrowed down.

The data can be replayed and revisited as many times as needed. The number of video recordings that could have been collected would have been quite limited if I had tried to be present at all the recordings. Lastly, videotaping is becoming more and more economical since the equipment and the tapes are more commonly available. Further technological development such as digital random access recording devise and the computer analysis equipment will make this data collecting method more attractive and handy for many researchers and students.

Issues in Data Collection

Presence of the Researcher on or off Site

In past studies using video recorded data, procedures have included asking families to record themselves (Becker 1988, 1990; Snow et al. 1990; Vuchinich 1990); the researcher setting up the video equipment and then leaving the scene (Ochs et al. 1989); the researcher setting up the video equipment and minimizing their own presence (Goodwin 1981); and the researcher as active participant observer in conjunction with video recordings (Tannen 1984). The first two types of procedures -- asking families to record themselves and setting up the video equipment and then leaving the scene are what I called "remote observation," i.e., video recording without the researcher's presence on the research site.

In my study, I arrived at this method after a series of pilot studies, in which I found that my presence as a researcher radically influenced the course of conversations between the hosts and the students. That is, the conversation took place mostly between the host families and me, and rarely between the host families and the students. The students became observers under these conditions, despite the fact that the purpose of my study was to investigate the interaction between the hosts and the students.

The researcher as "active participant" in studies utilizing video-recorded data does not, however, necessarily jeopardize the value of the data. Erickson's study (1990a), where he included himself in the video frame at the dinner table interaction of an Italian family, being a case in point. This kind of data explicitly demonstrates the researcher's position in a setting allowing for accurate self-reporting (e.g., Iino 1993). The influence on the discourse by the researcher's

presence should not be seen as negatively affecting the natural conversation, but as creating another new local environment in this type of study.

Participants' Awareness of the Camera

From viewing the video data, I came to believe that the presence of the camera had negligible impact on the course of the conversation. It seemed that their attention was focused on food consumption, negotiating conversations, and all the routine interruptions (e.g. answering the telephone, adjusting the air conditioner). On one occasion, one host father came out of the bath wearing only *suteteko* (Japanese underwear), and another host father was wearing pajamas while he was flipping *okonomiyaki* (a Japanese food). On another tape, a mother and a daughter were engaged in a dispute (in a register uncharacteristically informal for Japanese people in the company of 'outsiders') about what Japanese people in general like for food as opposed to what individual Japanese like. In another dinner table interaction, there was a lengthy explanation by a host father to a female American student on the subject of female toilet etiquette in Japan. Taboo subjects such as this are unlikely to be brought up or, at any rate, pursued at length, if the participants are concerned about the presence of the camera. The minimal impact of the camera's presence, in this study, was also, importantly, minimized as a result of the host families' assumption that it was the American students language use, rather than their own, which was the focus of the study. Although we cannot assume that the participants are totally unconscious of the camera observation (cf. Wolfson 1976:199), the critical factor is whether or not the participants consciously changed their normal behavior as a result of the camera's presence. In my study, the data suggested that it did not.

There were, however, a few occasions in which the participants talked to me through the camera. I was, in a sense, a completely "passive participant"

(Spradley 1980:59) in the situation despite the fact that I was not present at the site. It needs to be stressed that we cannot or should not assume that the presence of the camera is completely forgotten or ignored by the participants. Duranti (1997) says that the camera-effect is only one special case of what is usually called the participant-observer paradox, and that being a social actor, a participant in any situation and in any role, means to be part of the situation and hence affect it. Goodwin (1981) argued that being observed is part of natural conversation where participants know that they are being observed during any interaction and have techniques for dealing with this knowledge. Thus, the issue may not be what the participants do when they are not being observed, but whether the camera has an influence that is significantly different from human participant observers.

According to Duranti (1997:117), the "impact" of the camera's presence can be made a non-issue only by (i) not studying people or (ii) by not letting the participants know that their interactions are being recorded. Researchers in the free world know that neither of these two extremes are realistic choices. We have to use appropriate data collecting methods which fall between these two choices.

Privacy Issues

There are several ethical issues of which researchers need to be aware in collecting data. First, the risk of violating the privacy of participants who provide the settings for the research needs to be considered. In my study, the privacy issue involved the socioeconomic status, and the power relationships within the host family, which the dinner table conversations and the scene itself reflected. A video camera captures conditions inside the house, the clothes the participants wear or do not wear, the food consumed, table manners, etc. Secondly, sensitivity to the students' privacy and their apprehension in being observed was needed. The students were already in a vulnerable position, feeling

stress from the use of a non-native language and living in a different culture. In order to alleviate anxieties that the families and the students may have felt, it was important to maintain friendly relationships with them. Prior to starting the study, I explained the general purpose of the study in writing, noting that I would use pseudonyms to disguise their identity in any future reportings of findings.

Other Issues of This Type of Data Collection

In this remote observation method, there is no control over the quality of the recordings. Participants become defacto technicians, and despite high quality equipment, attention to optimal use of the equipment tends to be neglected particularly in terms of positioning of the camera (which, in this case, also effected microphone placement), lighting and background noise (in particular the TV).

Secondly, because of the informal nature of the domestic setting and the consequent lack of control over variables such as whole group participant presence at the dinner table, requesting participants to record at scheduled intervals within the course of the eight week program proved problematic. Initially, I had planned to do a comparative analysis of early and later interactions by requesting that the recordings be made in week 2 and the final week of the program. The homestay families, however, did not adhere to the requested intervals. Thus, I was obliged to abandon this initial research question.

Issues in Data Analysis

Selection of Discourse Segment —typical or atypical

As I have previously pointed out, video recording technology, such as I used in my remote observations, makes it possible for researchers to revisit the research site as many times as they wish. The magnetic video tapes store an accurate record of precisely what happens in the scene. When watching the video scenes, it is important to bring together all the other data collected about the particular scene, such as the site documents, the family description, and the interview notes. While reviewing the tapes from beginning to end, I started taking "fieldnotes" indexed with the video time-counter numbers, so that I could easily revisit the scene later. I repeated this sequence several times for the 30 video tapes collected. After finding consistent patterns in the data, I selected twelve tapes, which best represented the observed patterns, and roughly outlined the entire conversation of each tape in order to "map" the topics (see Erickson 1982 for further discussion on audiovisual data analysis). After this rough selection process, I narrowed down the choice of the segments and made accurate detailed transcripts for analysis.

The first and by far most important step of this kind of data analysis is to choose the discourse segment which appears to be typical for the research purpose. This step largely depends on the researcher's world view -- experience, knowledge, values, etc. Again, the principal tool for ethnographic studies is the researcher him/herself. The central concern for this selection process is whether the scene is typical or atypical for the particular type of interaction. Although the goal of this type of study is not to test preset hypotheses in a controlled experimental setting nor to generalize the results based on statistical data, the generalizability of the findings from the data may be questioned. Regarding this issue, Erickson (1990b[1986]) distinguishes statistical generalization and logical generalization, and emphasizes the importance of the reader's judgment in constructing the meaning out of the data as follows:

> The responsibility for judgment about logical generalization resides with the reader rather than with the researcher. The reader must examine the circumstances of the case to determine the ways in which the case fits the circumstances of the reader's own situation. (p. 174)

The information that is available on the screen cannot portray the larger social context in which the event takes place. In this regard, microethnography is "not an alternative to more general ethnography but a complement to it" (Erickson 1992:1). Disciplined subjectivity is called for because the entire process of analysis, including the initial decisions of what to record and how to record, and the later transcription decisions (cf. Ochs 1979), cannot be entirely neutral in that they depend on the researcher's knowledge and perception. The linguistic and sociocultural knowledge or assumptions that an analyst can bring into the context delimit the possible meanings of the scene.

Review Sessions

Review sessions with participants are advocated by some researchers to verify the researcher's interpretation (Neustupny 1990, Erickson 1982). At the completion of the data analysis, I conducted a number of review sessions with view to seeing if the participants could provide any insights, either elicited or incidental, about their intentions and reactions at the time of data collection. The value gained from these review sessions in this study was minimal, however. Participants were either not interested in revisiting the scenes or hesitant to express, in front of the researcher, what was going on in their minds during the interaction. I, too, had reservations about showing segments to participants, feeling that I might be perceived as criticizing recorded behaviors. There were times when I felt participants were viewing me as a counselor. It seems that there should be more discussion regarding how review sessions can be better used for the purpose of research and application to language education.

Issues in Reporting

Reportability

Researchers are constantly facing the acceptability of the results when they report. The PC (political correctness) of the findings often conflicts with the individual and societal norms. The researcher often faces the dilemma of either having to selectively eliminate from the findings, data which may not be politically correct at the time of reporting *or* to present findings in their entirety and to risk a potential backlash. In my study, the dilemma I encountered was whether I should select segments, for detailed analysis, which included what might have been considered by a third party as racist remarks. Part of this dilemma also stemmed from my self-identification as Japanese and my own personal reaction to the comments.

Privacy Issues Revisited

In addition to what I have already mentioned above in the Step 1: Data Collection section, the researcher needs to pay further attention to the participants' privacy when the result of the study is reported. For example, it is a common practice to use pseudonyms to refer to the participants and/or the organization in reporting. However, replaying of a video scene in the presence of a third party (such as a conference) compromises the participants' privacy, unless the participants' faces are mosaiced (or covered) and their voices electronically altered to disguise their identity. The 'audience' (in the case of a conference, for example) often request to see the video data as evidence and

researchers often show the Hi-Fi data in order to support their findings. At many academic conferences, I have witnessed researchers showing video data in presentations without covering part of the screen or monitor (i.e., the participants' faces). In my conference presentation, I recently adopted a seemingly primitive technique of using sheets of paper placed on the video monitor to cover the facial parts of the participants. As a condition of my using video recordings, all the participants know is that the tapes will be used for 'academic purposes.' They do not know which segment of the video tapes will be analyzed and presented, and in fact the researcher typically does not know either at the time of data collection. If I were the subject of video recordings, I would probably feel uncomfortable about the fact that my face is shown even if only in an 'academic' setting. It is not clear what degree of freedom is allowable for 'academic purposes.' Can the video tapes be broadcast on educational TV as long as it is considered 'academic' from the researcher's point of view?

This issue came to my attention when I attended the Nagano Olympic Games as a volunteer interpreter in February 1998. When I was issued my accreditation card, they asked me to sign the Consent to use my likeness and name, restricted use of photographs and films "Image Consent," which was crafted in the following way:

> By using the accreditation issued by NAOC, I agree to be filmed, televised, photographed, identified and otherwise recorded during the Olympic Games under conditions and for the purposes now or hereafter authorized by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in relation to the promotion of the Olympic Games and Olympic Movement. I agree that all photographs and moving images taken by me at the Olympic Games, including those of athletes competing within any Olympic venues, shall be used solely for personal and non-commercial purposes, unless prior written consent is obtained from the IOC.

In the above consent, it is still not clear how my picture can be used. I signed the consent without questioning the detail because there was a long line behind me waiting to get the accreditation card. In any event, it seems that the

people captured in the video recordings are in a powerless position in that their image can be used in a context to be created by the reporter.

Conclusion

As seen in this paper, video recording is indeed a powerful and necessary tool to capture what is happening in a specific scene. The vidual data in this study showed that the Japanese host families relied heavily on non-verbal means of communication during dinner table conversations. In conducting this type of field-work research, the researchers also need to be aware of the existing issues involved in every step of data collection, data analysis, and reporting. It seems that there should be some sort of detailed guidelines specifically for the use of video recorded data for 'academic' purposes. I call for more discussion about how video technology can and should be used in language studies, and whether we need to set more rigorous ethical guidelines in the field particularly when human subjects are involved.

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